

CAYMAN ISLANDS

The Cayman Islands got slammed by hurricane Ivan in September 2004, and thousands of residents home were seriously damaged or destroyed. While most establishments on Little Cayman and Cayman Brac recovered in a few weeks, many Grand Cayman businesses were more affected. None of the readers' comments below reflect the aftermath of Ivan, so divers hoping to travel to the Caymans will need to do their homework. *Undercurrent* will keep you posted.

Cayman Brac

Brac Reef Beach Resort, October 2003, Jeffrey Bell (jeffkbell@aol.com)
Mableton, GA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 84 to 87 F, calm, choppy. My wife and I are very pleased. This is definitely a dive resort; do not expect a lot of shopping and restaurants. The hotel is very nice and geared to diving. The food was above average served buffet style. The chef is top notch. Three dives a day. I loved the diving and the dive boats and crew and shop. (www.bracreef.com)

Brac Reef Beach Resort, July 2004, Chuck Levine (cblevine@suscom.net)
Red Lion, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm. second year in a row staying at Brac Reef Beach Resort! The resort is clean and comfortable, the meals satisfying, and the company of the resort and dive staff pleasant. The

divemasters/instructors who staff Reef Divers are fantastic people: warm, engaging, witty, knowledgeable about the local diving, and more than willing to go above and beyond to make the whole diving experience as close to nirvana as possible. They set up our gear on day one, never had to worry about a thing until after our final dive on day six. Very few sharks, several turtles, hundreds of thousands of spectacular coral, sponges, fishes, and invertebrates to feast our eyes on at every turn. Snapper Reef was a favorite of ours, a site my daughter and I got to visit three times during our stay, without any complaint from either one of us. She found lettuce leaf sea slugs, secretary blennies, coral banded shrimp, arrow crabs, yellow head jaw fish, fairy basslets while just poking around, in addition to the larger friends: tang, jacks, barracuda, parrot fish, queen and French angels, trumpets and, of course, snappers, etc. Cayman Airways Express between Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac. CAE seems to regularly lose/misplace/forget luggage, and it seems like it's a regular occurrence. It doesn't seem to bother the airline personnel with whom we interacted that the absence of personal belongings (including dive gear) might negatively impact a week long vacation.

Brac Reef Beach Resort, August 2004, Craig Blackman (blackiecb@cox.net), Tucson, AZ. Experience: 100-250 dives. Vis: 90 to 125 Feet. Water: 85 to 89 Fahrenheit, choppy. The resort was all inclusive. Resort tips are included in your bill (not diving). We didn't get the

night dives with our week but other divers said it was in their package. Check first. Food: Desserts were excellent. Food was self service and varied from French to English cuisine. Can't say any English cuisine is great but they did an excellent job of it. We dined at a local restaurant. Cost about \$60 for a diet coke, shrimp cocktail, and pasta marinara. The resorts food was as good as or better than restaurant. The rooms were Motel 6 ordinary and they all had a view of the pool. Some rooms have outdoor balconies and patios. Get one of those. The rooms were clean and tidy. We all had to marshal all of our bags to and from the resort, and then to the rooms. We had 11 people leaving on a 5: 00 a.m. plane. The resort called for only one cab so we carefully stacked all our bags, got most people in the cab (van), and then stacked bags on everyone's laps. The dive operation was two morning dives and one evening dive. You are always helped leaving the water and your equipment is immediately moved to a fresh tank. You dive from one boat so after diving you take just your skin, mask, and computer off the boat. Your gear is clean water washed at day's end but it stays in the sun all day. At night the boat is moved to another mooring, so you do not have access, at night, to any gear left on the boat. Night dive was \$60 and was a short three to five minute ride to the site. Tanks are locked up at night, so if you do want to shore dive, make sure to ask about it and then put your night tank outside. Also, this will mean taking your equipment off of the boat. Mesh bags are provided. Two divemasters are on every boat. They are knowl-

edgeable and friendly. On every dive one will lead a tour for those that want it. Dive briefings are done at the site, a problem for people prone to seasickness. Every time the divemaster redraws the site while you wait. Laminations would have allowed people to talk about the site on the way to and after the dive. A head count is taken on every dive. Nitrox 32 is available for \$125 a week or \$6 a bottle. We missed the first day of diving due to weather. The resort discounted our night dives to \$20. One of our divers was sick and missed another day. Weather forced us to leave a day late. Although, this diver missed the first and third day the dive operation still charged him for the extra day. A dive profile was briefed for computer and non-computer divers. Everyone was expected back on the boat in 45 to 50 minutes. On many sites you have the opportunity to finish the dive at 25 feet or less. But because of the arbitrary time limitations you have to cut your dive short. Now that your first dive was shortened they want you back in the water in 45 minutes. I had just finished a Nitrox course and even with Nitrox they recommend a minimum of 60 minutes between dives. When I asked for more time the divemasters said I didn't need it and then pressed everyone to get back in the water. Take another \$10 for each diver if the weather is nice since they will ask for agreement from everyone to go around the island. If they stop at the cliffs at the end of the island and tell you how special a dive it is, ask to go somewhere else. The entire dive is hard pan and is about equal to a dive in the Gulf from

San Carlos, Mexico. Clearly posted in the dive shop is the recommendation to tip the dive staff \$100 for a week. Cayman Airlines lost one couples bags for three days. The rest of us got our bags on arrival. Rent a car rather than a scooter. Price is only about \$6-8 more. Although, everyone was nice, particularly the resort staff, and the food was quite good, I doubt I will dive there again. The reef is close enough that they could setup for nice shore diving. They could even allow you a drop off for a second dive in the afternoon. The artificial limits set on computer divers is not conducive to my getting the best diving for my dive dollar. UW Photography Comments: One small table on boats for cameras. Luckily there was only one other diver with a full setup. Otherwise table would have been too small. I asked about keeping the camera immersed between dives and was told I could bring something to put under the table. I used the trash bin from my room. Lots of small turtles, both Kemp's ridley and loggerhead. At least two sleeping nurse sharks and reef sharks. Golden morays. Quite a number of Lettuce sea slugs and file clams. Russian warship didn't have a lot of sea life despite being down about 10 years. Must be because the hull of the ship is aluminum. A video of one of our dives was included in the weeks cost and the videographer did an excellent job. They did take us to Bloody Bay Wall on Little Cayman. No additional cost but it is weather permitting. Divemasters stated their policy was to dive with a buddy. But when I explained that I had been diving alone since 1980, did not want to be responsible for someone

who's skills I did not know, and that I was a photographer they relented. But they asked that I stay near to the boat.

Brac Reef Resort, August 2004, Ken Hobday (khobday@checkfree.com, Blacklick, OH. Experience: 26-50 dives Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 84 to 87 F, calm. Valet diving at its height. The boats are fabulous. When you're ready to dive, you take a seat on a bench at the back and the DM's bring your gear to you, tell you how much air you have (you still should check yourself) and off you go. When you return you take your fins off in the water and hand them up. Good Nitrox (32%). Test your tanks and label them each afternoon for the next day's dives. Then they will be on the boat waiting for you in the morning. You're always welcome to trail around with the dive-master in the water. Each buddy pair pretty much does their own thing. We dove with Craig and Vicki most of the week. Both are really good at finding interesting things and pointing them out. Second year here We did 17 dives and only four were at sites we had been too last year (and we certainly didn't mind going back to those). One new site, Elkhorn Forest (just offshore from Divi Tiara), is an amazing site with tons of new elkhorn growth on top of old hardened Elkhorn. One of our favorite spots. We spent more time on the South side because the seas were calm. I like the South wall better. Brac Reef Resort is about as pleasant a place as you could stay. The staff is the friendliest I've ever encountered. The pool and hot tub are great, but the covered dock with swings and hammocks

make the place. Every night, we trooped down to the dock to watch the tarpon and one night three squid entertained us for quite a while. August weather — warm in the middle of the day but quite bearable and incredibly pleasant either out on the water or in the shade. The food is good and plentiful with plenty of variety. It's not gourmet fare; I actually wouldn't mind paying a bit more for an upgrade in the cuisine department. Dry table on boat (no rinse on boat) and separate rinse tank on shore. DM's will hand you your camera once you're in the water and take it from you at end of dive. Good dive shop with helpful professional photographer.

Brac Reef Beach Resort, August 2004, Rob and Judy McDonald, Cambridge, MD. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, choppy. Third trip here. Resort excellent, has pool, beach but no real swimming as it is too shallow, hammocks on beach that are great but they need more of them. Liesel is at the front desk and is great. Quite nice little gift shop and you can donate to the Humane Society on the Island by buying a tee shirt. Food good and lots of it, served buffet style and lots of selections. One night went to Captains Table (excellent, get the conch fritters). Sara remembers who you are and things you like. Divemasters Craig and Vickey are both friendly, knowledgeable, easy going except if you don't dive safely they are quick to realize you need help. Get Craig to tell you about the thong wearer on the trip to the Tibbetts wreck! Boats in great

repair, divemasters top notch, gear taken care of for you. You gear up at the back of the boat, you sit and they bring the gear to you, and do giant stride into the water. We had great dives. We saw lots of turtles, several sharks, bristle worms, cushion star fish, green and spotted moray eels, lettuce leaf sea slugs, etc. Great amount of tropical fish and lots of small critters, pair of midnight blue parrot fish that had to be 3-4 feet long. Great place for large groups too as everything is here and trying to more a lot of people to different restaurants is not always easy. Great to have a boat big enough to take care of keeping a big group diving together too. Ed Beatty has photo shop and you can rent equipment or get plenty of info on taking pictures. Get his video of your dives.

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, October 2003, Jay and Sheila Harmer (jbsaharmer@prodigy.net) Burbank, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy. 5-minute drive to the resort just across the end of the runway. The morning jet noise was not that bad. Room that was basic with A/C, ceiling fan, excellent cross ventilation, a balcony overlooking the freshwater pool, sand beach and offshore reef, tennis courts and beach volleyball and the usual beach sports equipment. Free bicycles but watch out for the bugs if you visit caves. Check the tires, as some were nearly flat. Signed the usual waivers and exhibited our C cards and received an introductory briefing. Mandatory to have a dive timer or computer and an octopus regulator. We

had dive computers but I was without a spare regulator. The shop offered me a regulator for \$5/day. If I had known about this beforehand I could have brought one from home. I remain incredulous that after singing releases of responsibility, initializing paragraphs, all witnessed that dive operators still want to control your behavior. Dinners included, steak and lobster, carved ham, prime rib, roast turkey, crab, shrimp and various fish dishes. Sides were excellent and varied and dinner included wine and deserts. Salads were fresh and included all the fixings. For breakfast you could order eggs any way, pancakes and French toast with ham, bacon, sausage, fresh fruits, cereals, with coffee, tea and juices. Lunches, which were not included in our package, were offered as a choice of self made sandwiches @ \$7.50, salad bar @\$10.00, and what they called a "Full Lunch" @\$15.00, which included all of the above, plus an entree like ribs, meatloaf, or monster burgers. The service was buffet style in an air-conditioned restaurant that created a friendly chatty atmosphere. The diving was generally good and the dive staff competent and courteous. The boat as twin diesel cabin type that sometimes became crowded with 12 or more divers. Fruit and chips were offered between dives and plastic trash can was filled with fresh water for cameras but not for masks. A regulator was hung over the side and fills were consistently 3000 and when a tank came up low it was quickly exchanged. We dove the West end both on the North, better, and south sides of the island. Transit times were from 10-

30 minutes. We saw plenty of small tropicals and large fish, especially grouper, rays, and turtles and invertebrates like lobsters and crabs. We had a close encounter with a large eagle ray and swam with a turtle at arms reach for about 25 minutes. The general restrictions were 110 max 1st dive, 60 max 2nd dive and except for the Little Cayman trips were not time limited. A divemaster was in the water after the last person left the boat and so we generally never really saw him or her. Briefings were good noting the occasional mild currents and bottom points of interest. There was a minimum of equipment schlepping. There is an on pier equipment storage area with numbed pegs and hangers. They offered to rinse and hang your gear and have it ready for the next day's dives. I didn't get that same warm and appreciated feeling that I generally receive from other boat crews. Little Cayman's Bloody Bay Wall was easily the best diving. 45-55 minutes each way, necessitated reduced bottom times. This coupled with a late return and a rush to get in lunch lessened the value. Night dives are also scheduled however it takes 6 for a trip. We were unable to gather enough divers. The dive shop offered the required octopus regular gratis. This seems like a fair policy for shops that have unusual requirements. We had to have our luggage, including dive gear, ready for transfer to the airport at 2:30 P.M. on the day of our last dive. This meant that we had to pack wet dive gear and live out of our carry-on's for the last night. This seemed to be related to a restriction on the amount of baggage

that Island Air's aircraft could haul, as the deHavilland DHC- 6 was nearly full. By the way, it also seems that Island Air requires that batteries be removed from checked baggage. (www.divitiara.com)

Divi Tiara, February 2004, Gary Saunders, Waterford, CT.

Experience: 100+ dives. Vis: 100 to 150 feet. Water: 82 F. I am a FSDA certified diver. I ran a dive business in SW Florida in 1970, 1971. When I moved back to Connecticut, I sold my dive gear and haven't dived since due to cold and poor visibility. While on vacation in Cayman Brac, we decided to introduce our 12-year-old daughter to the world of scuba. We took a resort course together (I can't believe how much the equipment has changed) and did an escorted open water dive on the west end of Cayman Brac. Dive Tiara is a top-notch operation. Liz, the manager, does a great job, and Rich, the English instructor, was especially patient and professional and made my daughter extremely confident. A wonderful, quaint island with top-notch dive facilities.

Divi Tiara, February 2004, Nancy Kirk, Florence, MA.

Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: 25. Cayman Brac is very underdeveloped. Excellent flora and fauna on land, sea and in the air. Dive operation is first rate.

Divi Tiara, February 2004, Pete & Mary Pinkerton, (pink@frontiernet.net) Walworth, NY. Experience: 700 – 800 dives. Vis: 70 to 90 feet. Water 79 to 81 F. We had been hearing nega-

tive things about Divi Tiara and were a little concerned about accommodations before we left. Max and staff have done a tremendous job of cleaning up the hotel and could not have been more accommodating. We had a great week!

Divi Tiara, March 2004, Karma Manley, FPO, AE.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 Fahrenheit, choppy. The accommodations were very comfortable, not fancy. The food was a step above mediocre but it was abundant. The resort is situated on a beautiful beach. The dive operation was top notch, with excellent boats, attentive and enthusiastic divemasters and crew. We never had to schlep dive gear. It was picked up at our room upon arrival, stored conveniently in on-dock storage during the week, and then returned to our room before check-out. They were very flexible. Many divers in our group were taking an underwater photography course and they adjusted the schedule to allow time for class. They were happy to take us out for night dives. Home of the Nikon School of Underwater Photography. Very experienced and knowledgeable photography staff. Onsite E-6 processing, dedicated dunk tanks on dock and boat. Boats have dry forward cabin for changing film/batteries. Boat crew familiar with handling camera gear. Excellent attention paid to UWPs.

Dive Tiara, May 2004, Bob Sugarman, Miami, FL. Vis: 80-100 feet. Water: 80-82 F. Experience: 100+. Dive operation gave excellent service and assistance. True valet diving with

caring, personable divemasters (Ken, Richie, & Barbie). Food was good and plentiful – go for the full meal plan – and Cliff, the Chef, started each day with a cheerful greeting. Accommodations weren't deluxe as advertised, but adequate enough for a pleasant and comfortable stay.

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, June 2004, Jerre Sadler (jerlynsad@aol.com) Bartow, FL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, choppy, surge. Cayman Air's ineptitude with customer service is all but unrivaled. Everyone at Divi is geared to providing the best possible vacation for their diving and non-diving guests. Max (manager par excellence) kept the restaurant open for us after Cayman Air fouled up our flights causing us to arrive at midnight. Resort staff is both courteous and friendly and helpful. The meals were excellent in both quality and quantity. Excellent dinners await you after your afternoon shore dive or island excursion or hammock dive. Slide and video shows are held after dinner. Bugs are not a problem unless the wind is down at dusk. 3 trips to Little Cayman to dive the legendary Bloody Bay Wall and Jackson's Bight. Our boat crew was Canadian captain Ken and Brit divemaster Rich who made it their mission to ensure that our Central Florida dive group (Neptune's Underwater Tours) dove the best sites. Max outlined common sense dive restrictions. Your boat crew handles all of your dive gear for the week. You are provided a numbered mesh bag for your gear that is used also for shore diving, etc., after coordinating

that with your crew. You have unlimited tanks for shore dives/night shore dives. Your crew will provide a thorough dive briefing of each site you dive and one of them will dive with you to help you find the little or big things you miss. On board you get as much help with your gear as you need, a fresh water rinse is provided along with a water cooler and ice chest for snacks between dives. Captain Ken's pre-dive artwork of the site is choice along with the animated British site description provided by Rich who was wounded for our week, having stepped on a nail a few days prior to our arrival. Car rentals are available and island tours are recommended to see the Bluff (Brac) along with the many caves used by islanders during hurricane visits. The Brac museum and the "Mall" should be seen, as well as long beach walks on both sides of the Bluff end of the island to see the blowholes and driftwood and the flotsam and jetsam. Diving the "Big Blue" on the walls, great visibility, light currents, normally stable weather, beautiful corals and psychedelic tropicals, numerous turtle and shark sightings, healthy grouper and snapper populations have made me a repeat visitor for 16 years. Thankfully the Brac has escaped what Grand Cayman has become with its traffic and modern day hustle and bustle. The rooms are all air conditioned, are clean and well appointed, have comfortable beds and plenty of room to store/hang up your things. They have a phone for wake up calls, a TV to keep up with CNN, and a balcony/porch to hang up skins and other wet things to dry. There is 110v

current on the island, so no converters are needed. Bring your batteries, film, and other personal supplies as things are expensive on the Brac. Boat crew sensitive to photogs needs, helpful with cameras, etc., dedicated rinse tank on board, no real work area on board, film supplies and processing on site, instruction and rentals available, videos and slides available for purchase, slide and video shows during week in evening, and the delightful photo pro Barbie is always available on site.

Divi Tiara Dive Resort, July 2004, Brian Lake (BWLake@comcast.net) Costa Mesa, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm, no currents. Rooms were air conditioned, and comfortable with some TV stations available. Full breakfast and dinner were included in price and the selection and food were great. The dive package included a daily two tank boat dive in the morning. Leave at 9AM return by 12:30PM — 1:00PM. Dive sites scheduled depending on weather, made two crossings to Bloody Bay Wall on Little Cayman, about 45 minutes each way. We were each given a numbered bag which we put all of our dive gear in, with the exception of our 1/2 mil. wet suits, and put them on our porch. The dive crew picked them up, and until they returned them after our last dive, we didn't have to touch our gear, except to put it on. It was always on the boat we had signed up for and ready to go. Nitrox \$85 each for the week for 14 tanks. Afternoon dives were available at a reasonable cost. We went the last part of July and the first

of August. They had special low season rates. Photo shop across from Dive shop. Quality rentals available. Slide development available at Photo Shop. Separate water tank for cameras on board each dive boat.

Reef Divers, Carib Sands, July 2004, Timothy, Jill & James Kolakowski (tkolakowski@ma.rr.com), Eric, PA. Family week. Our comfortable, clean two bedroom condo was spacious and comfortably furnished. The kitchen had a refrigerator, stove, blender, microwave, coffee maker, toaster, dishes, pots and pans. Our fridge was stocked, at our request, with groceries and Karen and Ian Stewart, the folks who were organizing Family Week, and were happy to run people to a grocery stores. Family Week was perfect for us as divers with an 11 year old son, because he had terrific activities to occupy him while we dived with Reef Divers. Valet diving. We dove on "Big Sister," a well-equipped, comfortable 46' Newton, with double dive ladders at the stern. Divemasters Chris and Jason were professional, courteous and skilled. Reef Divers supplies mesh dive bags You suit up and carry your mask and fins to the stern, and they bring your tank to you and help you into your BC, At the end of your dive, you were helped off with your BC, and your equipment was changed onto a fresh tank. Chris and Jason were also great at finding neat things. In our week ee saw a huge loggerhead, three hawksbills, juvenile purple seahorse, adult orange seahorses, sail fin blennies, fireworms, goliath groupers, nurse shark, copper lobster, file clams, secretary blennies, eagle

rays being hounded by permits, schools of barracuda, flying gurnards, upside down jelly fish, cushion starfish, brittle stars. Reefs are healthy and the shallower reefs have tons of juveniles. We loved our day at Little Cayman (Randy's Gazebo on Bloody Bay Wall was awesome). We found plenty of great sites around Brac. Easy diving (no strong current, no surges, wonderful viz). Family Week activities included bird watching on the bluff, island tours, hikes in the parrot reserve, seining in the turtle grass, star gazing through a wonderful telescope, underwater slide shows, poster contests, incredible balloon creations by Matt Tyson, scavenger hunt, cookout on the beach, and a sand sculpting contest. The giveaways and prizes were unbelievable. We came back with a dive bag, dive light, books about the island, u/w camera, PADI hats and sunglass strings, mesh bags, T-shirts, DAN first aid kit). Karen, Ian, Natalie and Jimmy were fabulous with the kids. (www.866thebrac.com)

Grand Cayman

Aqua Adventures, July 2004, Paul Johnson (pajkotwf@aol.com), Santa Rosa, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to Fahrenheit, calm, no currents. A small operation that will provide you with first class personal service. Look up Rob at Aqua Adventures (aqua@candw.ky).

Bob Soto's Reef Divers, Treasure Island Resort, March 2004, Michael and Elaine Jerome, Beloit, WI.

Experience: Michael 95 and Elaine 55 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 79 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 ft. first, 60 ft. second. West end was calmer. Treasure Island Resort was so-so. We had a hotel room this time. Soto's operation was good. They were very efficient. Good dive sites, big boat, more people, but not too bad. Dive briefing so-so. Sixty with guide on first dive. Had choice to go guided or not on second dive. I would dive with them again. (www.bobsotosreefdivers.com)

Bob Soto's Reef Divers, London House, August 2004, Eric Multhaup (mullew@pacbell.net), Mill Valley, CA. Experience: 26-50 dives Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 Fahrenheit, calm. A large operation that runs at least two boats a day, but neither boat feels cramped when full. Periodic organizational glitches as far as hotel pick-ups, equipment rental, etc., but the dive staff corrected the glitches quickly. The dive instructors and divemasters are Americans or Brits on a fairly short work permit, so the level of enthusiasm is high. They run an entertaining night dive right off Seven Mile Beach two or three times a week. London House is a comfortable condo complex on a non-commercial stretch of Seven Mile Beach.

Cayman Diving Lodge, December 2003, Brian Lake (BWLake@comcast.net) Costa Mesa, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, choppy, surge. Cayman Diving Lodge is on the East end of Grand Cayman. The rooms were clean, well cared for and air-con-

ditioned. Price includes room, three meals per day plus afternoon snacks, and two or three boat dives daily. Night dives and trips to Stingray City are extra and require a minimum number of divers to sign up. The staff makes you feel like you are part of their family. Once you put your gear in a provided mesh bag, you don't have to handle it again. They carry it to the boat and hook it up. When you are through diving for the day, they carry it back, rinse it in fresh water, and store it in your assigned locker. Separate facilities are provided for guests to hang up their wet suits. The view from the resort is great. While we were there, it was quite windy with 3 to 5 foot swells. Each boat (they have two) is equipped with a bar to hang onto while you take off your fins. A crew member stands on the ladder to steady it for your exit out of the water. It was the best experience we had had in rough weather diving. Naturally, there was plenty of water and either punch or lemonade on the boat, and dry towels for each of us. Usual number of divers on a boat was 8-10, with a minimum of two well-trained crew members. Hard to beat for the price, service, accommodations and friendly staff. UW Photography Comments: Separate dry table and fresh water facilities for cameras. Crew handed cameras to divers and took them first upon return to boat. Divemasters skillful at pointing out picture opportunities. (www.divelodge.com)

Cayman Dive Lodge, January 2004, Karen Moore (krmoore399@sbcglobal.net) Huntington Woods, MI.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 110 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, no currents. Great operation, great staff, great diving. I had badly broken my ankle one month before our dive trip (requiring a plate and 3 screws). My cast came off 2 days before we arrived on Cayman. I had E-mailed Jim that I would need extra assistance, and then never worried about it. We had been to CDL 2 times before, and the staff and service were unbeatable. Again the staff was fantastic. I never touched my equipment. Divemasters helped me into my gear at the back of the boat, and I just leaned into the water. After the dive, I took my gear off in the water, with staff assistance getting it on board. This trip occurred just before the Undercurrent article about extra special treatment for divers being offered in some places. I was treated like a queen! The divemasters were always concerned about what the divers wanted to see, divers' needs, and where the best conditions existed. The coral was healthy. The East End has great swim-throughs, caverns, and canyons. We saw silversides and jacks in the caverns, many tarpon and large morays, parrot-fish, filefish, angels, puffers, lobster, crabs, barracudas, several flamingo tongues, a shy hamlet or two, a permit - an Atlantic fish, and a soldier fish with an isopod on it. I am sure there were plenty of other fish that I am forgetting. The rooms are comfortable and adequate. No TV or phones in the rooms (we consider that a plus). There is a wonderful open air dining room with great food prepared by Tim and Roy. Buffet breakfast followed by hot lunch buffet that is ready as soon as the boat

comes in from the 2-am dives (1 wall dive, and 1-60 foot dive). There is an afternoon snack followed by a sit-down dinner. The staff eats with the guests, and camaraderie abounds. Dawn is the friendliest bartender around. If guests have booked a 3-dive package in advance, the pm boat goes out even with only 1 diver on board. Night dives and trips to Sting Ray City are available. We love the quiet of the East End and we love CDL.

Cayman Diving Lodge, April 2004, Richard Parry, Westfield, NJ. Vis: 50-70 feet. Water: 78-81 F. Experience: 300+. The East End is great diving. Good walls and the swim-throughs with large silver sided tarpon. We dove with three fairly large gray reef sharks, one with a hook in his mouth and 10 ft of leader trailing. This spot is a reef dive and a wall dive, dep on the wall and a 50 ft second dive on the reef. The food is simple and good. There is no TV, no phone, and no pool, just plain comfort and good diving. Take a few good books since there is not much else and taxis require a home equity loans.

Cayman Dive Lodge, April 2004, Tripp Jones MD (Tjones@sc.rr.com) Columbia, SC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 125 Feet. Water: 76 to 79 F, calm, choppy, no currents. This was our third trip to CDL, and as before, was quite enjoyable. The Lodge is adequate, comfortable, and certainly clean. We were met promptly at the airport by the McCurley's bus and returned there on the day of departure, on time. The food was good, not great,

but plenty and varied. The bar and boutique are both on the honor system and where else have you seen that! The staff is excellent and there has been minimal turnover in the past several years, suggesting that this is a well-run operation, which indeed it is. The boats are fine, with good speed, stability and reliable. The dive sites are superb, both the deep wall dives and the reef dives. The small critters were plentiful and the reefs were healthy. There was a very healthy fish population overall. The dive crew is excellent, and they try to please all the divers, asking who has dived which sites earlier in the week. They allow you to dive your profile, but are superb in finding critters and pointing out interesting tidbits. The diving was superb and the visibility was wonderful (80-125+ feet). .Excellent dive operation.

Cayman Diving Lodge, July 2004, Chris Aviles, Kenmore, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm. Cayman Diving Lodge is away from the hustle of 7 mile beach and we loved it. Could dive your own profile with computers. Accommodations were not the newest but the rooms were clean and the AC worked great. Food was excellent and served family style. There were fresh baked cookies daily. Jim meets everyone and makes them feel at home. . DM are all experienced, friendly, have worked for CDL for years and clearly love what they do. The boats were spacious and clean, O2 on board. Divers don't have to touch their gear all week. DM guided the dives or let you do your own profile.

The DM always took time to point out interesting things on the dives. The diving was relaxing and fairly easy. No pronounced walls like Little Cayman but the coral was healthy with lots of reef fish, rays, tarpon and turtles. We saw a few sharks. I had several 65+ minute dives. Perfect place for doing 3 tanks a day and relaxing. The operation and the staff were the best of the 6 we have used on the Caymans.

Cayman Dive Lodge, September 2004, John Walker (jwalker@napanet.net), Sonoma, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 83 to 88 Fahrenheit. Undercurrent was right-on about how great CDL was, perfect for the single diver from the week before Ivan right up to evacuation. CDL received extensive damage from Ivan's wind, storm surge and looters.. The boats were not damaged. The owners offered credits to encourage guests to evacuate to safety. They were calm and accommodating. Guests were trying to get flights out one day after arriving and were on hold more than 2 hours to some airlines. My flight was cancelled less than 24 hours before departure, one day before airport closure. It required some scrambling and 7 hours at the airport and I just made the 12 hour no fly time. I would have regretted not having a satellite phone with extra batteries, food bars, a water filter, a good map of the island and a plan to contact relatives if I had to stay. I had a back pack for my valuable dive equipment. Anything left in the rooms would have been gone. What will probably not change when CDL reopens is service,

which was excellent in and out of the water combined with great diving. It has family style meals (one big sit down) all varied and excellent, 3 dives a day by a competent, friendly, fun loving staff with your equipment taken care of for you, and a bar for post meal gathering. I would not advise renting a car — too far from town, left hand drive, roundabouts, shops close at 6 dinner starts at 6:30, long drive, A.M./P.M. traffic jams. CDL posts daily dive reports with pictures on its web site; check the conditions prior to your trip and those at home can follow your diving. Boats had designated camera tables and dunk tanks, 45 min from town and 1 hour photo (for film), Power in rooms and internet access in lobby for digital

DiveTech, Cobalt Coast, October 2003, Daniel O. Benson (drb@danielobensonmd.com) Klamath Falls, OR. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 50 Feet. Water: 84 F, choppy, no currents. Cobalt Coast is a small, upscale resort on the "West End" of Grand Cayman. It is away from the crowds. To get to town you can take the small buses, which costs \$2.50 . (For an extra \$1.00 more they will drop you at the resort.), or take a cab (about \$20 from town). The resort owner and manager, Arie, provides personalized attention, and makes you feel very special. The wait staff can be a bit aloof, but this seems to be a Caribbean trait. DiveTech owner Nancy Easterbrook runs an excellent dive operation. Two nicely appointed boats leave from the marina for a two tank morning dive or a one tank afternoon

dive (transportation is provided). They dive the great North Wall. You can plan and execute your own dive profiles, and we were able to get 1+ hour dives almost every time (unlike other dive operations which can start getting on your case if you take longer than 1/2 hour on a dive!) Divetech operates a dive shop at both Turtle Reef and Cobalt Coast. The house reef at Cobalt Coast is o.k., but the one at Turtle Reef is much better. Try to hitch a ride to Turtle Reef. At Turtle Reef dive out about 50 yards to a very nice wall. Hang a left to see a large number of Tarpon. Keep your eyes open for sailfin blennies, pike blennies, and of course eagle rays, turtles, etc. The "big wall" is a very long way off shore. It can be done as a shore dive, but once you get there it's time to turn around! The big wall at Turtle Reef is more of a steep incline. Big wall at Cobalt Coast is a nice wall, and for \$5 they will take you out to the wall and drop you off in a Zodiac. (www.divetech.com)

DiveTech, October 2003, James Scott, Wilton, CT. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. DiveTech runs quality technical dive training programs. I was able to schedule, on less than 2 weeks notice, a full certification program on the Inspiration, including them providing a rental unit. Classroom sessions were efficiently scheduled, in an air-conditioned room. Video assists, including PowerPoint, were available. They provided an excellent description of what I should expect, and they completely met my expectations. The facilities included full Nitrox and trimix

capability as well as the rebreather on which I was certifying. The dive store seemed well-stocked.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, February 2004, S. Lee Bowden, (lbowden@thesagamore.com) Bolton Landing, NY. Experience: 1,000+ dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 81 F. Cobalt Coast keeps getting better all the time. New rooms open in May of 2004. Let's hope it doesn't get any bigger. I took a Trimix course all week. Mike Lucas is an excellent instructor. All of the gang at Dive Tech were superb! Nancy runs a tight ship and the quality of instruction is unsurpassed!

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, June 2004, Ann Kugel (akugel@rr.nyc.com), New York City, NY. Vis: 50-80 feet. Water: 82 F. Dives logged: 750-1,000. Close to New York and I can just hop down for three days. October 2003, I had a total shoulder replacement and I wanted to try it out with a dive shop that I knew would be helpful. They made it perfect and, I was able to dive again – something I wasn't sure I could do.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast Resort, July 2004, Cheryl Morgavi Mire (cmire@bellsouth.net), Metairie, LA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 90 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 Fahrenheit, choppy. Group of 28. On the return flight check-in at Grand Cayman an inspector perused every single compartment of our luggage, from smelly wet-suits to a week of dirty laundry. Great Cuban food in the Miami airport. Cobalt Coast Resort is on the less visited Northwest corner of the island. Most

rooms are upper level ocean view, but a few are ground level on the parking lot side (they call these garden view). On either end, the upper and lower level accommodations are actually suites. AC broke upon arrival. Arie, a lovely man who manages the resort, moved our belongings moved to full suite on the opposite side of the property for the remainder of our stay. Since our package was all-inclusive. Breakfast was a buffet of scrambled eggs with a variety of meats. Some days pancakes or French toast. Fresh fruit and juice. Lunch and dinner alternated between buffet or menu. Lunch Caesar salad with chicken was good. Evening meal was served buffet style, usually with a hot soup, salad, plentiful entries and side dishes with dessert. The last night we had fine steaks grilled. Chocolate pecan cheesecake was a favorite. Fish selections were excellent. Pass on the cold apple soup — dreadful. Two boat dives in the morning with the opportunity for shore dives any hour day or night. One day, the boat had four Nitrox tanks under filled and not enough tanks were on board for everyone to get a second dive with Nitrox. They credited us for one tank on our bill. The attention to details at Dive Tech ran from simple inconvenience to troublesome. The boat was smoking badly, obviously needing engine service. I inhaled so many fumes I had to sit out the second dive. Five other divers also donated breakfast to the fishes. The slightly rough surf and truly lousy ladder into the boat did nothing to help the situation. Later in the week, the engine finally overheated so much that they were forced to take the boat

into dry dock for repairs. We got to use another dive operation's boats, with excellent ladders, plenty of water and a gracious crewman on board who actually helped us get out of the water. The staff of Dive Tech had an Attitude! Our divemaster pointed out that the only time the Americans were friends with the English was when we needed them to fight a war. I guess he forgot about that little skirmish in the 1940's. I take special care not to strain the vertebrae in my neck, so I take my gear off in the water. I told the dive staff that I would need assistance, and I am accustomed to tipping for the extra service. When they did retrieve my BC and tank from the water, they dumped it on the end of the boat and barked at me to move it out of the way. On more than one occasion, divers provided more service than the crew. Be prepared to limit your dives to 40 minutes on the first dive and 50 on the second. I was returning to the boat with 1500 psi or more. The shallow dives offered virtually no areas shallower than 65 feet, so although you had plenty of air and energy, you had loaded on so much nitrogen on the first dive of the day that your second dive was self-limiting. Still, the crew struggled to get you back in time for lunch at 1:00 or 1:30. What took so long? There's the bus ride to the boat dock. That nice long dock off the resort is useless. It's a shallow area and the sea can be quite choppy on that end of the island, so every morning at 7:50 you had to bag up your own gear and pack it in a truck. Then you are trucked to 10 minutes away. Then you hauled your own gear from the truck and back at the end of the dive — every day. . There

was one tiny tank of dirty water to rinse their gear morning and afternoon. A large trash can of water was a camera rinse tank. Luckily, our room had a tub, which of course became our personal rinse tank. Little Cayman and Grand Cayman are superior. We did see more eagle rays at Gail's Pinnacle than in our previous seven years of diving. They swam close enough for photos. We stumbled on a nurse shark competing with a grouper for his share of large fish. Watched a giant lobster scratch his back on the coral — made a long swim back to the boat only to be welcomed by our glaring divemasters. My favorite Brit jumped into the water to rescue me when I was about 10 yards from the boat. When he reached me, I told him I still had 1800 PSI but if he wanted to feel useful, he could haul my camera back to the boat. It was the most assistance I got from him the entire trip. Fish life was standard, lots of angelfish. Turtle Reef offered some of the most lush coral vegetation and plentiful fish life. We saw tarpon and large grouper. We explored the reef outside the resort a few times, and were never disappointed. We had fun in town. I have decided that the Cayman Islands are a good place for people to shelter their financial resources but not a good place for me to see fish.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, July 2004, Christopher Aviles, Kenmore, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm. Cobalt coast resort was a clean, new, well run establishment. Food was served restaurant style at tables and all the staff were accommodating and

friendly. Rooms were spacious and clean, AC worked great. Dive Tech is on the premises but owned separately. Most DM's were arrogant, rude and one was simply nasty. Several never glanced back at the group after entering the water and regularly pointed nothing out. One younger DM drank beer before we could take our gear off the van that shuttles (5 minute ride) between the resort and dock ("have to replace bad bubbles with good bubbles"). The DM would not touch your gear all week. I mean, not even help you swing your gear bag onto the boat. A 20+ dive group complained in the shop and the next day the DM helped with gear bags but would not help divers who were not part of the group that had complained. The shop was disorganized. I booked my trip 6 months ahead but was put on an afternoon dive the day before a morning flight. When I tried to change it they blamed me for not solving this before arriving. There was mention of a shuttle that would take divers to their sister shop for shore diving, but when I asked they said to rent a car and myself. The dive shop does not communicate well with the hotel either and we were double charged for a dive trip. A few DM were competent and personable but the rest tainted the whole experience.

DiveTech, Cobalt Coast, July 2004, Suzanne (mckinney37@cox.net) Metairie, LA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 25 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, choppy. Dive operation was faulty. No initial boat briefing. On one dive over 20% of the Nitrox tanks were unusable because they were under

filled. On another day, they ran out of water after only one dive. Divemasters had an attitude, they strictly warned us about harming the coral yet were found knocking into it with the boat captain going into small crevices. The first day the original boat spewed diesel fumes throughout the dive area so many people got sick. It dumped its coolant into the water on the third day, almost caught fire and limped back to port. The next day we had a better boat from a different operation. The van they used to transport us to and from the resort to the dock broke and we were stranded for about 45 minutes. On one day the Nitrox tester failed and they didn't even have a pen to write into the Nitrox log. Yet the divemasters asserted that there was nothing wrong with their operation. The resort was great. One boat had no rinse tank for cameras, (or anything else). Cameras were placed on table and had to be moved quickly to accommodate a smoking engine.

DiveTech, Eden Rock, Sunset House August 2004, James Heimer (jmsjnk@earthlink.net), Houston, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 30 to 70 Feet. Water: 85 to 88 Fahrenheit, calm, choppy, no currents. My wife and I have a time share on GCI and shore diving. Our favorite was the DiveTech operation at the Turtle Farm. We also dove Eden Rock (45 - 50' max depth), and Sunset House, which is where Kathy Church has her photo shop. Both the Turtle Farm and Sunset have "mini walls" and access to the main wall with a little effort on the swim. We saw numerous turtles, moray eels, large tarpon, and the usual tropi-

calms in abundance on nearly every dive. The weather was hot, sunny, and calm. Hurricane Charlie passed near GCI near the end of our vacation, so we lost one day of diving. I would rank shore diving in GCI on a par with Bonaire. You don't have to worry about rampant theft from your vehicle, there are a large number of sites with easy access, and many sites have dive operations on shore. The e wall is farther offshore and there are no diveable wrecks from shore; also you won't find the exotics — sea horses and frog fish. Both islands are expensive, but there is more variety of food on GCI. DiveTech had best facilities for cameras - dedicated rinse tank and carpeted table for set up.

Dive Tech, Westin Casuarina Resort & Spa, September 2004, David Vickery & Suzanne Leeson (twodivers@att.ne), Hoboken, NJ. Experience: 501-1000 dives: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 Fahrenheit, calm, choppy. "These two", the DM gestured at my partner and I, "will probably go to 130 feet. Don't follow them." The staff at Dive Tech will let experienced divers do their own thing. They just don't want newbies following you down. We were chagrined to learn that since we weren't staying at Cobalt Coast, there would be no place to stow our gear. At the end of each dive day we had to hump it up to the room at the Westin, rinse it in the bathtub, and hang it over the balcony. Westin as nice pool bar, great sunset beach, nice cigar bar, excellent restaurants (bring money), nice mini-bar, a world-class spa (do it, guys), decadently comfortable mattresses, and, um, the bars were

nice, too. Dive Tech is still standing, but their two boats were washed 1000 yards away from their mooring during hurricane Ivan. Cobalt Coast survived with minor damage. During our six days of diving, we were allowed to leave the group, go off on our own on the first dive, and basically follow our computers. When we returned to the boat, we were not asked for maximum depth and time. Some folks have reported the staff to be less than friendly. Our take on it is that most are very friendly, some become friendly when they figure out that you know what you're doing, and some, like the Tattooed Lady, deal with the Open Water courses day in and day out, and have become, frankly, a little too cool for school. One or two of the staff need to remember that newbies become oldbies some day, and instructors or divemasters who relate to them as mentors help them form positive opinions of the sport for years. The "Atatude", a 45-foot twin-screw monohull is reasonably large even with 12 divers, and accommodates almost everyone on the bridge. The head is, well, a head, but they've got one. The aluminum 80's a filled to 3000 psi, and the Nitrox fills (32% only), are fairly consistent in percentage of O2. Huge schools of horse-eye jacks and Bermuda Chubb, so many turtles we stopped counting, schools of tarpon, three Eagle Rays, nurse sharks, and, unbelievably, during a shore dive at Turtle Reef, an 8-foot hammerhead cruising the sand flats with his bar-jack buddy. We took the West Bay Express, an afternoon scooter trip from Dive Tech's shop at Cobalt Coast to their shop at Turtle Reef. It's a

little clunky getting six divers and two staff all going at once, and the scooter's performance depends upon the age of the battery, so we tended to spread out, but we loved it; at least a dozen turtles, some rays, lots of tropicals, and a chance to see a large chunk of the reef, some not visited by boats.

Divers Down, Grand Caymanian, June 2004, Tom Garber, Tehachapi, CA. Vis: 70-120 feet. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 105. Diving was enjoyable — most sites were interesting with lots of swim-throughs, cuts. Saw quite a few tarpon and turtles. Short boat rides — never more than 8 divers on boat, often times just my wife and I and another couple. Divemasters asked where we wanted to dive each day. They were great tour guides on first dive and didn't dive on second. Had to shlep gear across sand to board boat at beach. One boat has exhaust leak. Food prices high — average \$100 for dinner for two. Should have stayed closer to 7-Mile Beach or town. (diversdown.net)

Don Foster, cruise ship (Enchantment of the Sea), December 2003, Kenneth J. Davis (kjdm@aol.com) Scotch Plains, NJ. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. Don Foster accommodated me at the last minute when Red Sail Sports cancelled our pre-booked trip due to not enough divers. They picked me up and drove me back to the dock. Diving was wonderful — a wall dive at Little Tunnel — swim through to 90 feet and then back up the wall, a shallower reef dive at Wildlife Reef. Saw a friendly turtle, lobsters, 2

super male parrot fist, multiple angel fish, a small eel, and lots of other great stuff. Truly memorable dives despite the lack of pelagics and sharks. (www.donfosters.com)

Indigo Divers, London House, August 2004, Eric Multhaup (mullew@pacbell.net), Mill Valley, CA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 Fahrenheit, calm. Launched in August 2004 by Chris Alpers, former manager at Cayman Divers, and his partner Kate. Their boat, the Cat's Meow, is customized for diving comfort, with capacity for six divers, a cushioned and shaded area, and a cushioned open sitting area. It is conveniently moored at the Yacht Club behind Seven Mile Beach. You can schedule your trip at your own time, and maximize the chances of getting the mooring at one of the premier dive spots, such as Eagle Ray Pass. The larger boats that all head out at the same time in the morning have to disperse on a first come, first served basis. You don't have to do anything except dive, talk about diving, or think about diving. All tanks are kept next to the entry platform, so you just walk back, sit down, gear up, and roll in. Chris is familiar with the dive sites from long experience, goes directly to the best available spot, and leads a great dive. Kate is really talented with the video camera for big animals, micro fauna, and divers in action. The cost reflects the quality of service, \$100/person, and \$100 for a trip video plus stills. www.indigodivers.com; indigodivers@aol.com. London House is on the noncommercial stretch of Seven Mile Beach, and had a two bed-

room condo with large living room, 2 ? bathrooms and a kitchen at a reasonable price. A rental car is essential to get to stores, restaurants, dive destinations, etc. (www.indigodivers.com)

Ocean Frontiers, Morritt's Tortuga, March 2004, Michael & Elaine Jerome, Beloit, WI. Experience: Michael 95 and Elaine 55 dives. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 ft. first, 60 ft. second. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 79 F. Excellent dive briefings at all three operations. We made a timeshare exchange into Morritt's and they were outstanding. Dove with Ocean Frontiers on report of Chapbook and found them to be very good and helpful. We had 25 mph east winds, which made for 7 to 10 foot seas. Ocean Frontiers let us reschedule some dives. They canceled their 3-tank safari to Sting Ray City on account of heavy seas and gave us credit for 2 tanks and set us up with Red Sail Sport out of Rum Point at their expense. Ocean Frontiers was great. Also made a shore dive with Dive Tech at Turtle Reef on northwest end of 7 Mile Beach which was very nice. (www.oceanfrontiers.com)

Ocean Frontiers, Morritt's Tortuga Club, June 2004, Rick Glider, Tucson, AZ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm, choppy. Ocean Frontiers (oceanfrontiers.com) is a 1st class outfit that spoils its customers. They're on the northeast end of the island and we dove sites on the north and east sides. They offered free shuttle service to and from Morritt's. If you dive multiple days with them, simply put your gear in a

provided basket. They will rinse it off and store it for you. Upon arrival, you're gear is set up on the boat. They also change your gear to another tank after the 1st dive. I dove with them for 2 weeks (20 dives) and the only sites we repeated was Stingray City (due to the dive packages I took) and the night dive (both night dives were great; 20 feet for 60 minutes). Dive briefings were complete. Boat had no more than 12 divers, broken up into 2 groups. Nitrox is available. 1st dive (100 feet) is guided. 2nd dive (keep around 50 ft.) is guided or on your own (dive your computer). Everyone associated with Ocean Frontiers was friendly and enthusiastic. There were separate rinse tanks for masks and cameras and a small table to put the cameras, glasses, etc.

Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, September 2004, David Vickery & Suzanne Leeson (twodivers@att.net), Hoboken, NJ. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 Ft. BANG! Lightning streaked into the water two miles away on the North Side as we surfaced from the dive. One diver asked, "Is it dangerous to be in the water in a lighting storm?" Ever a calming influence, I replied, "Only if you're wearing an aluminum tank on your back." Ocean Frontiers is a friendly service-oriented operation on the East End. If you stay at Compass Point, you roll out of bed and into the dive boat. Your gear will be on an aluminum 80 with suit, fins and mask under the bench seat. After the second dive the staff will rinse and hang your gear up for you. The "Nauti-cat" a 42 foot aluminum twin-

hull with two jet drive engines and an "emergency head" that could be used by permission only. The favorite spot is on the bow, where you can hang your legs off the edge as the boat skims along.. There is a camera table and rinse bucket. The "Top Cat" is a 45 ft. mono-hull on which you are not permitted to visit the bridge. The only place we could escape billowing diesel fumes was on the bow, and after 15 minutes of intense sun the choice became burn or choke. Friendly as they are, they err on the side of caution. At Kangaroo Gorge we were told to stay in a group and descended through a crack in the reef onto wall and turned left into a swim thru leading to a pinnacle that would be circumnavigated clock-wise. The group kicked up silt in the swim thru, so I turned right, descended a chute and swam counter clockwise to meet the group. Five ocean triggers swam by as I scanned the healthy gorgonia, sponges, black coral. I was breathing a mix of 31.8% Nitrox and bottomed out at 134 feet. When we returned to the boat I reported my depth and time and the DM, Ralph Dye, a gregarious Aussie, disciplined me for going too deep. Five minutes later he was back again harping about my depth. I told him that TDI permits diving to 1.6 ata PPO2 which is where I was. He said Ocean Frontiers uses IANTD rules which permits only 1.4 ata PPO2. Five minutes later he was back again; "Look, if you go deep, others will follow. That's the problem." This made sense and I stayed above 110 feet (or so) for the rest of the trip. The following day we dived Maggie's Maze, cav-

erns and swim throughs filled with horse-eye jacks and tarpon. The surge in the caverns was about three feet per pulse. The floor was harp pan and rocks so I put my gloves on, surfing the surge and grabbing a rock until the next pulse. Big mistake. I ascended to the ladder and DM, Aneto Treuter, an otherwise friendly Afrikaaner scolded me, "David! No gloves! It's a very big fine (\$5,000) on the island!" Presumably they impound the gloves as well. Nevertheless, the U/W scenery was great, lots of excellent second dives, not a lot of big life. They report that Hurricane Ivan actually washed the algae off the upper reef and cleared sand out of the cuts, creating new swim-throughs. The coral didn't suffer much, but the sponges got hammered. Compass Point survived the storm well, having been built to hurricane code. Compass Point is quiet and clean, well-equipped with a fridge, microwave, stove, dishwasher and washer/dryer in the room. There were two cable TV's a stereo, comfy furniture and complimentary bottle of wine and fruit plate. We stocked up in Georgetown and did several lunches and dinners on the balcony. We also drove to Compass Point for lunch at the marina, waited for the day boats to leave, finished lunch and had the place to ourselves. The restaurants near Compass Point, Portofino and Palm Beach, are destroyed, and the Lighthouse suffered a similar fate, so stay at Compass Point, buy some food, cook for yourself, and invite the dive staff up to the balcony for a beer. Just don't go below 110 feet in your gloves.

Ocean Frontiers, Reef Resort, September 2004, Gabriel I. PeZagaricano (guigo34@hotmail.com), San Juan, PR. Experience: 501-1000 dives Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 Fahrenheit, calm. Ocean Divers is a truly top-of-the-line operation, perhaps the best run diving facility I have visited. The 100-foot restriction is a pain but can be endured by ignoring the banging on the tank alerts when you are observing something interesting deeper than the limit. The guides are friendly and helpful. 14 dives in 3 ? days were no problem. The seas were unusually calm and the water temperature excellent, as was the visibility most of the time. Small area for cameras on board and a large fresh water drum.

Ocean Frontiers, Reef Resort, September 2004, Jose A Crespo Rivera, Guaynabo, PR. Vis: 100-150 feet. Water: 86-90 F. Dives logged: 350+. Ocean Frontiers is one of the best-organized and well-run dive operations. Accommodations at the Reef Resort were superb. Great walls and rock formations, no big fish, many corals dying (I guess from global warming). First dives are always guided with a little too much babysitting. Also, they tend to mix novice divers with advanced divers.

Red Baron, Red Sail Sports, Marriott, January 2004, J. Dexter (ajdexter@locl.net) Rome City, IN. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 90 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. We found the accommodations at the Marriott to be much nicer than many had stated in

previous issues. There really is a small beach area that probably becomes non-existent with higher tides. We were able to walk the entire 7- Mile Beach going in either direction from our hotel. The resort was convenient to many places and we even walked to Georgetown. We used Red Baron for our deep dives, but they were unable to accommodate us for diving in Stingray City. No one told us that there are actually 2 Stingray cities. One that is waist deep and the other about 5 feet. We used Red Sail Sports for this trip. They gave a very good briefing. They are fine for a dive as easy as this, but they had huge boats that would hold many people. We were lucky and there were only 4 of us that day. A couple that was on our boat was told it was good for snorkeling as well as diving. This really was not the case, they needed to be at the sandbar location. You really do have to be careful feeding the stingrays. My husband had one latch onto his arm which drew blood and instantly left a huge bruise that was swollen for days later. Red Baron is good for the advanced diver who wants a small boat and to do their own thing. They gave an ok briefing and on the second dive told us to do our own thing. On the first dive Patrick guided us and took along his camera. About mid way thru the dive his camera was not working and he signaled that all of us stay where we were and he went back to the boat to drop off his camera. This should have been done on his own time rather than leave us waiting and use air! We found the island to be very quiet this time of the year, and as everyone says, expensive! (www.redsail.com)

Red Baron Divers, July 2004, Tom Newman (tom_newman@msn.com) Alpharetta, GA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F, calm. Nick and Patrick run 2 boats with a max of 8 dives each. They let you dive your computer, have great knowledge of the area. It was breeding season for sharks and they knew where to take divers to see them. On one dive we had at least 8 reef sharks and 1 hammerhead around us. Excellent operation. (www.redbarondivers.com)

Sunset House, January 2004, Greg Yarnik (gregyarnik@comcast.net), Palatine, IL. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 Fahrenheit, calm, no currents. We took advantage of Cayman Airways' newly-instituted Wed/Sat-only non-stops from O'Hare to Grand Cayman. Although the resort decor and dive boat fleet (definitely aging with a few air emission problems) could use sprucing up, the overall experience was positive because of the professional, attentive, and friendly dive/resort staff. Oceanfront room was comfy with air conditioning/fridge/necessary amenities; a room safe was available for nominal daily charge. On-site Sea Harvest restaurant and My Bar provided better-than-decent food/drinks; bar was especially busy with both locals/guests for the gorgeous sunsets each day. Dive operation is headed by Women's Dive Hall-of-Famer Erika-Leigh Haley and it's a very good one. Staff personnel were knowledgeable and experienced. On-site shop is full service, offering all types of rental (or purchase) gear for both the beginner and techie. Tanks are

always available for shore dives although the ironshore entry area can get dicey in the chop/surge often present. Boats depart each a.m. for 2-tank dives to sites all around the south, east and north shores, with local weather/current conditions dictating the day's site. Boats generally transported only 6-8 divers with a crew of 2-3. Pre-dive briefings (complete with multi-colored grease pencil/board sketches of the reef and dive site) were among the best we've had. Divemasters (esp. Dustin, Rob, & Jonesy) were attentive without being overbearing, always helped point out resident critters, and allowed divers to dive their own profiles if they so chose. My wife, who had been rehabbing knee surgery stateside, received much-appreciated extra assistance entering/exiting the water. Depth limits on wall dives and bottom times for non-computer divers were strongly enforced. Otherwise, it was the standard, "back-on-the-boat-with-not < 500 psi" mantra. Sea conditions can be variable in January; we happened to pick a good week with low chop/surge, evidently just missing a bad one when conditions were barely diveable. Reefs were in fair to very good condition (esp. good were Kent's Caves, Governor's Reef, and Gary's Wall). The usual small-medium sized reef species predominated with occasional rays/turtles/barracudas. Stingray City trip was OK to do once, but was otherwise a bit schmaltzy. The only detracting factor of the trip was the daily arrival of 3-5 cruise ships which would moor just outside Georgetown Harbor within spitting distance (or so it seemed) of our room and proceeded to disgorge thousands of tourists/shoppers

into town each day. Sunset House earns our praise for a terrific dive and hotel staff, better-than-average facilities and amenities, and good diving overall. Prospective photographers are well supported on boats with camera-only baths and segregated dry storage shelving for camera gear. Renowned photographer Cathy Church has her gallery, store and classroom on site at Sunset House. A terrific resource! On several occasions, divers were accompanied by Ms. Church's intern who snapped "action" photos of guests as they navigated dive sites. Photos were downloaded onto disks for those who wished to purchase them, however, there was no pressure to do so. (www.sunsethouse.com)

Sunset House, March 2004, Larry Sensenig (LSensenig@aol.com) Sioux City, IA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm, no currents. Weather was very pleasant (low 80s) and we had a lot of sunny days. There was a lot of shopping and exploring to take up the afternoon hours. The Turtle Farm is a must see, but don't bother going to Hell which is a real tourist trap. Learning how to catch the city buses is an advantage. Seven Mile Beach is beautiful. If you want isolation, don't stay in or around Georgetown. I enjoyed diving. In a weeks time I saw spotted eagle rays, barracuda, tarpon, angle fish, lobster, banded shrimp, French grunts, fairy basslets. The Sunset House is a dive oriented establishment. The people were friendly and helpful. One thing to keep in mind in going to the Caymans is that it is 25% more expensive than in the U.S.

Treasure Island Divers, Wyndham Suites, August 2004. Bruce & Karen Wallace Indianapolis, IN. Water 82 to 85 degrees F. Visibility 60' to 100'. Dive own profile OK with depth limits at 120'. What will \$479 get ya? 5 days/4 night in a full suite at the Wyndham, clean sheets, towels, dishes everyday and 6 dives with Treasure Island Divers! Excellent info from TI's Ft. Lauderdale staff, easy reservations with airfare and rental car (saved \$85 over Travelocity). The weather was outstanding, light breezes all day and a short shower in the afternoon to cool things off. Food at the Lone Star was excellent and inexpensive. Sondra was outstanding behind the TI desk, Rick was the best DMs, no more than 6 divers each trip, always 3K in each tank, gear care with numbered bags, free photo guidance, great photo sites, in shop computer photo review and dive site choices by divers. Valley of the Turtles 2KM north of Turtle Farm is release point for mature turtles which becomes their nesting grounds. This is a multi-level drift dive at 110' to 80' over spur and groove coral with little sand beds. More turtles than you can play with. Round Rock a multi-level with swim through at 62' and exit at 112' on wall. Down along wall to 125' to see second entry with exit back at 75' into sand bed filled with garden eels. Peter's Reef combined with the wreck of the Ore Verde. "Kermit" the moray at wreck site is big! He will open his mouth to display teeth for camera. (www.tidivers.com)

Wall to Wall, June 2004, Frank & Karla Sodnicar (frank@sodnicar.com), Brecksville, OH. Vis: 50-75 feet. Water: 79-83 F. Dives logged: 300. Sting Ray City was super — the interaction with rays and eels exceptional. 55 minute bottom times. Escorted divers through incredible swim-throughs. Nitrox available. Giles and Deanna were excellent guides and great company — always accommodating on sites and sharing their knowledge. (www.walltowalldiving.com)

Wall to Wall diving, Wyndham Suites, July 2004, Mark Goldsmith (scubnski@aol.com), Livingston, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm, choppy. Giles and Deanna are husband and wife owners. They have added a second 42 foot boat; each would accompany one of the two boats along with a second divemaster. Our boat was broken into two groups each limited to three divers. My wife was more comfortable having a guide with her and Wall to Wall accommodated. By the end of the first day all anxiety was gone and my wife enjoyed her week of diving.. Giles and Deanna feel that most dive injuries occur on the boat with divers sliding and falling walking with their gear on. They have the divers sit on the stern facing aft and the crew carries your previously set up (by the crew) gear to the diver and assist with getting it on. The diver can then just giant stride into the water. Wyndham Suites across the street from Seven Mile Beach...clean, adequate, pre-dive continental breakfast and lovely service. Wall to Wall picked us up at

8AM in front of the hotel. We were back from a two tank dive no later than 12:30. The restaurants in Grand Cayman offer the best and priciest food in the Caribbean. Don't miss The Wharf Restaurant and the 9PM tarpon feeding extravaganza.

Little Cayman

Conch Club Divers, The Club, July 2004, Steven Andrew Dingeldein (sdingeldein@triad.rr.com), Burlington, NC. Experience: 26-50 dives Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 Ft, calm. Favorite dive operation among many good ones I have dived with. "The Club" is closer to Little Cayman Beach Resort than Conch Club. Short walk down the road to dive and eat. The units were well equipped and very nice inside. Other than us, it was mostly deserted, except when Mr. Tibbets' family arrived to celebrate his 82nd birthday. Mr. Tibbets is a fountain of knowledge about the Caymans. The fireworks Friday night to celebrate his birthday were beautiful. LCBR is a great place to eat and to depart for diving. Bill, Tim and Ann were a fantastic crew. Several times we went exploring with one of them into nooks and crannies even up near the shore. The crew makes you feel at home and if you are a careful diver and show respect for the underwater world they take more time to show you things. Bill is fun and gracious. Tim is quick-witted and Ann added a feminine side that my wife and two daughters appreciated. Incredible dives. One dive I managed to catch a red hind attack a white spotted filefish. The hind then sat there and let me take pictures with the

poor filefish sideways in its mouth. A Pederson shrimp jumped on the filefish to pick off a last minute meal. Sharks were commonly seen by someone on the boat. Southern stingrays were almost absent; the crew wondered if it was related to the increased sighting of sharks. The dive boat, the Sea-Esta, is 40' Newton and has plenty of room and a nice topside deck. Usually there were no more than 12 or so on the boat and occasionally 6 or so. Divemasters rinse cameras when exiting from water. (www.conchclub.com)

Little Cayman Beach Resort, October 2003, Daniel O. Benson (drb@danielobensonmd.com) Klamath Falls, OR. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 F, choppy. Don't expect to be greeted with open arms here! There is no orientation to the resort or dive operation. Staff seems burned out or depressed! We were told to put our dive gear outside our room and someone would take it to the boat. Didn't happen. We found our way to the dive boat and sat on the dock while crew made themselves busy readying the boat. The staff completely ignored us! (a civil "hello" would have been wonderful). Diving is great for untouched beauty, with good sized Goliath grouper, terminal male parrot fish, etc. You are not allowed to dive your profile, and depth limit of 100' is enforced. (Recently the Cayman Islands water sports association changed the depth limit from 100' to 130', but Reef Divers sticks to 100'.) The profiles were such that we often came up with 900-1300 psi left in our tanks. I think the East End of Grand Cayman or the

North Walls of Grand Cayman are a better bet. (www.littlecayman.com)

Little Cayman Beach Resort, May 2004, Justin Newton (justin@gid.net) Woodland Hills, CA. Experience:

101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 200 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, no currents. The dive operators at Reef Divers were excellent. We had Coco and Ron as our divemasters. They were both very knowledgeable about the local dive sites and life, as well as just nice folks. They were concerned about diver safety without being controlling. Before each dive whichever divemaster wasn't going in the water, drew a map, and did the dive briefing. I found the maps were excellent, and gave a great overview of the area, including notes for macro life. The dives were spectacular. The reef is unbelievably alive, thanks to low numbers of tourists, as well as enforced marine conservation diving laws, like no touching anything. There were fish, well, everywhere. On the last dive of the trip, I remember telling my wife after the dive that I couldn't believe we were getting bored of seeing honeycomb cowfish and queen triggerfish. The walls were spectacular, some of them being as sheer as a skyscraper, from 15', to 6000'. Over the course of the week there was one so-so dive and the rest were great. While others in the group didn't feel the same way I did, I found the food at the resort bad enough that I lost ten pounds while on vacation. My high school was significantly better. The accommodations were ok. All the rooms are laid out around the pool and bar, which is generally ok. On our first

night, however, after spending like 18 hrs getting there, it was karaoke night, and instead of sleeping, we got the joy of hearing other people sing, badly. The resort staff were all very nice, and the bartender, Sue, was a stand out.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, July 2004, Christopher Aviles, Kenmore, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84

Fahrenheit, calm. A well run operation. The rooms were spacious and the AC worked great. The chefs cooked like they were culinary trained. You did not touch your gear all week, and DM brought your gear to two sitting platforms at the back of the boat. The DM were all competent and fun to be with. The DM asked if people were looking for macro, types of fish life, etc, and tried to point those things. The dive staff sets a nice tone to the operation. Saw nurse and reef sharks on several dives. The walls were spectacular and the coral was healthy. Could walk on the beach for over a mile and kayak if you wanted. Most people hung out at the bar but you could also relax and read in a hammock on the beach.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, August 2004, Marvin & Deanna Glassmann (marvg13@aol.com), Huntington, NY. Vis: 50-80 feet.

Water: 82-84 F. Dives logged: 130. The location is beautiful; we had a great view of the water from our room (for a bit extra cost). The dive operation was well run. The boat was roomy and fast. Sites were partially chosen based upon water conditions and degree of calmness. Most of the crew were good

guides; one was obnoxious. They were all attentive. Snacks on boat, table for cameras. Buffet style meals - food was plentiful and varied. Exercise room was a disaster - broken AC and equipment. After complaint, got a little fan. Mosquitoes - bring repellent.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, August 2004, Tripp Jones (Tjones@sc.rr.com) Columbia, SC.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Ft, calm, no currents. 4th trip to Little Cayman Beach Resort with our dive shop, Wateree Dive Center of Columbia, SC. The resort is excellent with great food and selection, and nice rooms, quite comfortable. The boats are modern, swift, and take 15 min. or so to get to the Jackson and Bloody Bay Wall sections of the marine park. The dive operation is professional, and allows you to dive your own profile, staying in CIWOA guidelines. The visibility was superb and there were plenty of turtles and more groupers than the last time we were here in 2001. The Nitrox compressor went down, so we could only use Nitrox 3 days. The dive staff is outstanding. Cayman Airlines by twin otter is always an adventure, but no problems except sweating out making the connection for a 1:45 pm flight to Charlotte.

Paradise Villas, January 2004, Mike Hynan, Grafton, WI. Experience:

101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, choppy, no currents. I won't repeat the praises from other Chapbook reports about Marc, Sabine, Vince, Rod, or the villas. They are not

overstatements. There is a new chief at the Hungry Iguana. The food has gone from "good" to "very good." My wife and I also enjoyed eating dinner on our Villa porch. The frozen steaks and pork chops at the nearby grocery store have been of high quality. While underwater Vince and Rod are very good at finding the "little things." They have taken us out diving when we were the only 2 divers at the resort one day. They have been very helpful with equipment problems, one time loaning my wife a regulator for the trip when hers became unreliable, another time providing me with a flashlight when mine flooded. Vince has updated their website: paradisevillas.com, and new pictures are posted on Fridays.

(www.paradise-divers.com)

Paradise Villas, February 2004, Earle E. Carpenter (ecrpnr@.com) Barrington, IL. Experience: 101-250

dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F, calm, choppy. We were a group of six guys with dive experience ranging from as few as a dozen to several hundred dives, on our yearly dive outing. We chose Little Cayman for its reputation as one of the premiere dive spots in the Caribbean. And we certainly were not disappointed. From the grass runway, the 55 lb. weight limits and the airlines attitude of — we like to fly and your luggage will arrive sometime — this was the place to kick back and Don't Worry, Be Happy. We chose Paradise Villas because Undercurrent said it was the best, and they certainly were right. We always had the feeling that Marc and Sabine were always there just for us — their

service was always beyond what we expected. They made special arrangements for breakfast for 6 guys who can't eat their own cooking in the villas, the luggage and dive equipment was picked up or left at the front door when arriving or departing, and rooms were always cleaned when we were away diving, service was always there. And, the Hungry Iguana was the restaurant where the locals chose to eat; where Anu made every meal a special event. Paradise Divers (paradise-divers.com), has a large flat bottom boat, which is very fast and very stable in rough waters, unlike some of the v-bottom cattle boats that others operate on the island. We never had over 9 divers on a boat that could handle 14 or more. Our dives were handled by Rod and Vince, who alternated between Divemaster and Captain. Their knowledge of the dive sites, the marine life and the safety of all the divers was excellent. They handled all the dive equipment from the time we arrived on the island until we left. A couple days we traveled further than all the other dive operations just to get to a dive site, which was in calmer water, they were always looking for ways to maximize our diving experience in Little Cayman. The Bloody Wall is truly one of the best dive locations in the Caribbean. The magnificence of the wall and the premiere condition of the corals makes the extra time flying out from Grand Cayman well worth it. The fish life was varied and plentiful and turtles were present on just about every dive. We were fortunate to see a pair of flying gurnards on one of our dives and also; Jerri the grouper came to swim

with us on another occasion. In four days of diving we didn't have a dive that wasn't beyond our expectations. It's great to see the condition of these reefs and also the care that those on the island are giving to their valuable asset.

Paradise Villas, May 2004, Ronnie & Tom Hess, Wescosville, PA.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy, no currents. Paradise Villas was perfect. Quiet, clean and spacious villas more than met our needs. The grounds are well maintained, and any problems (noisy air conditioner, wobbly ceiling fan) were attended to and fixed the same day (while we were diving). Dive operation provided no fuss, no muss diving experience. Divemasters Rod and Vince provided enough information prior to the dive and identified unusual creatures during the dive, but left you to your own experienced devices otherwise. Because you could elect to dive on your own, my husband and I spotted an eagle ray on the sand and spent a half-hour watching it feed and soar. Several turtles, and a lot of macro life, blennies, juvenile crynoids, pipefish, pipe horse, and jawfish (with eggs). UW Photography: For day boats, the set up was adequate. Fresh water tubs for after the dive, and storage tubs held them safely before diving.

Paradise Villas, July 2004, Kevin Robertson (kelseyfox2@cs.com), Knoxville, TN. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 75 to 85 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit, choppy. There are six villas with two units per villa. The units are clean with basic furnishings

and decor. Small refrigerator (5-7 cu ft). Small microwave oven and two slice toaster. Breakfast cereal and sandwiches best describe the cooking facilities. Very firm king size bed. Limited storage for clothes. All units share a spacious porch with the neighboring unit. Great ocean views that are beautiful. Hammocks in front of each villa are strung in the trees by the beach for peaceful naps and book reading. The beach shallows are mostly sea grass and not conducive for snorkeling. The beach is mostly large rocks. A good place to snorkel is Preston Bay where we lucked out in seeing a manta!. There is only one small, well stocked, mini market type grocery and liquor store on the island. We had to wait a couple days for milk shipped from Grand Cayman. They are a five min walk. The Hungry Iguana restaurant and bar is at Paradise Villas. They are not open for breakfast. We ate there six nights and the meals were delicious. Typical Cayman prices, hamburgers \$9 and dinner entrees are \$16-\$25. Nice cozy island atmosphere. I did two tank dives for five days with these folks. Paradise Divers does not have a dive shop to speak of. Buy whatever you might need before your trip. The dive boat is a 35ft roomy and clean boat. Its has twin 225HP outboards. The deck is covered by a canvas roof. There is a camera rinse tank. They rinse your gear and store it overnight. Each diver is furnished with a large plastic storage bin with lid for dry storage of personal items. "Meadows"—a long swim through at 80ft. As you end this long swim you see in the distance a most beautiful surreal blue shade of water.

When exiting the swim through at 103ft the beauty is indescribable. You swim into a huge canyon with walls all around you. I saw a large yellow sponge spawning with smoke coming out. There were majestic sea fans, soft and hard coral every where. I saw giant crabs tucked into deep holes in the walls. Lots of horse-eye jacks and grouper. Jerry the Grouper at "Donnas Delight" plays tag with squirrelfish and divers! A diver points to a squirrelfish and Jerry chases it into hiding in the reef. He does this over and over. Jerry will even let divers pet him. When we were being told this in our pre-dive briefing, I thought they were pulling something. Other sites offer fantastic healthy reefs with soft and hard corals, large sea fans and schools of beautiful small fish. I saw a large loggerhead turtle resting on a ledge of a wall. We saw one reef shark, sea lettuce slugs, lots of cleaner shrimp, spotted and green morays, queen triggers, queen angels, yellow stingrays, trunkfish and up close to schools of squid showing off there translucent color. The dive-masters, Vince and Rod are professional and extremely knowledgeable. They made the diving an adventure. Rod is great at finding interesting little critters. I learned a lot about reef life from these two guys.

Pirates Point Resort, October 2003, S. Titus, Herndon, VA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 F, choppy, no currents. Pirate's Point Resort has 10 rooms in several separate buildings), very casual, cozy resort on a private sand beach with a wonderful relaxed atmosphere.

A little funky and artsy, and totally comfortable. Large, clean, modestly furnished rooms, enough open space on the grounds for privacy, the place has a 'bed and breakfast' flavor. Rooms may or may not have A/C; we opted for natural air in a room close to the water and were quite comfortable with several fans and huge windows. It was wonderful to wake up looking at the sea from one's pillow! (October is the rainy season; we had a nice blend of sun and overcast with most of the rain at night). With an inclusive dive package, all meals and beverages (as well as a wonderful variety of wines at dinner) are covered. And what meals they are! Fresh, highest quality ingredients in amazing quantity and variety turned into absolutely top notch gourmet dishes with great presentation. The owner, Gladys Howard, is an entertaining, enthusiastic hostess as well as an accomplished chef and diver. We overlapped with several different groups of guests during our 10 days at the resort. While we were all quite diverse in culture, home geography, occupation and lifestyle, it was always a pleasant blend with good conversation and fun at the bar, meals, and on the boat. All dive instructors rotate as dining room staff, office management and dive guides. Many of the staff have been there for 5 years, some as long as 15 years. The level of service in all areas is unusually high and competent; no problem large or small stays an issue for very long. The diving schedule is quite civilized for a vacation. After breakfast you leave for the boat at about 9:15 (a very short van ride away) and return home around 2PM for lunch. The boat is

large and comfortable (it has a head) with room for multiple cameras. There are 2 consecutive dives, with surface intervals done on the boat. The first dive is limited to 100-foot depth, and the second dive is limited to 60 foot. Beyond those 2 restrictions, your bottom time is limited only by your computer and air consumption. We had many dives lasting well over an hour. The dive staff gives you as much or as little assistance as you desire while on the boat. Gear stays on the boat; wetsuits get taken back, rinsed and hung out overnight. Nitrox is available, and shore night dives are scheduled by request. Breathtaking vertical walls, expansive healthy corals and sponges, long continuous reefs, good species variety with plentiful juveniles and large adults. Reef, blacktip, nurse sharks and large southern rays were quite common, coming up close on both the walls and in the shallows; turtles of all sizes appeared on almost every dive; huge grouper and barracuda cruised through regularly. Our group had the pleasure of seeing a lobster with a head the width of a basketball — he was absolutely amazing. Our guides (Gaye, Coco and Steve) were incredibly adept at finding very unusual and tiny critters for macro shots (such as pipe horses, sailfin blennies, neck crabs, and leech headshield slugs) as well as being the first to alert us to incoming sharks along the wall. No TV at all (in rooms or in clubhouse/bar); no room phones; plenty of books to borrow from the library, and a selection of videos in the club room. Bring bug repellent to go beach combing, bird-watching (bring binoculars) or visiting

the iguanas since there are some no-see-ums and mosquitoes. There are no taxis; bicycles are available to explore the island or to visit another resort or bar. Guests are encouraged to enter the annual "art contest" Entries must be made only from materials found during your stay. When flying between Grand Cayman and Little Cayman or the Brac, or flying out of Grand Cayman, make sure any batteries for cameras, lights, etc. are separated in a single baggie or taped together. This will save you time and headaches at the security checks. No film processing on site. (www.piratespointresort.com)

Pirates Point, April 2004, Hollie Lindauer (hollielindauer@comcast.net), Salem, OR. Vis: 75-120 feet. Water: 78-84 F. Dives logged: 250+. We perennially return to Pirates Point for great, relaxing diving and a restorative vacation. The beautiful blue drop off at the placid Bloody Bay wall is always stunning. Comfortable dive boat, 5 to 15 minutes to dive sites, 2 dives AM — PM is free time. Beginners, experts and photographers are well taken care of by the unobtrusive, thoughtful staff. Everyone envies Gay's "state of Zen" buoyancy. The kitchen is excellent and accommodating — fresh, beautifully prepared selections unheard of for remote locations. Accommodations are rustic, private and quiet.

Pirate's Point Resort, July 2004, David Kulka (david@studioelectronics.biz), Burbank, CA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Spent 9 days at this all inclusive resort after reading many raves over

the years. Excellent diving, top notch staff, gourmet cuisine. Breakfast at 8 AM, at 9:30 vans bring divers to the nearby dock for a 2 tank dive. Comfortable boat with head, 80 tanks. Most dives were on Bloody Bay Wall or Jackson Wall. 100' limit on the first dive, 60' on the second. No time limits, but no deco diving. No touching anything underwater. Divers may follow the DM's or "do their own thing". After returning at about 2:30, lunch is served, then an appetizer or snack later in the day. No afternoon dive is available, shore based night dives can be arranged. The diving was excellent. Water temp 83-85, vis 90-150 feet, little or no current. Sunny weather, no rain. Loads of fish, many sharks (mostly nurse sharks, also one lemon), large turtles on nearly every dive. Many southern rays as well, and one eagle ray. I'm not really into macro critters but many other guests were, and the DM's were very good about finding and showing them to us. They were very conservation oriented and informative. Guests stay in duplex bungalows. Those facing the shore have fans, the others have A/C. A main building contains the dining room, kitchen, bar, dive shop, and entertainment area. there's a nice swimming pool, and hammocks near the beach. Atmosphere is informal and whimsical, reflecting owner/operator/chef Gladys Howard's engaging personality. The ceiling and walls of the comfortable bar area are festooned with funky and amusing arts & crafts projects constructed by guests. Dive packages include free juices, sodas, wine, beer, and mixed drinks, guests may serve themselves or order a

drink. Breakfast and lunches were excellent, dinners spectacular. Meals here were the best of my 16 years of dive travel. Cuisine included creative seafood entrees, Caymanian and Mexican cuisine, paella, Continental dishes, Texas BBQ, etc. accompanied by numerous side dishes, various red and white wines, and great deserts. Second and third helpings were encouraged. On full moon nights, Gladys serves dinner on the balcony of her nearby home, preceded by champagne and hors d'oeuvres. Chefs Diana and Cameron went out of their way to satisfy my wife's dietary requests. Gladys has created an elegant but informal, dive resort that overflows with hospitality and good vibes.

Pirates Point, August 2004, David Reubush (davereubush@cox.net), Toano, VA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 86 F, calm. 6th trip to Pirates Point. We decided to try it after reading Undercurrent and have been going back ever since. Gladys Howard and her staff make you feel like family. We have become good friends with people from all over that also come at this time. The staff typically have been with her for years. Bloody Bay wall is one of the best places in the world. Swimming from the boat in 25 ft. of water over the edge of a sheer wall that drops for 6000 ft. is the closest to flying. The coral is generally in great shape, the fish life prolific, and there are lots of turtles. The number of sharks has also increased. The Cayman marine park is really working. One dive site even has a resident Nassau

grouper that likes to be petted like a cat, though no feeding is allowed. Food is out of this world. We were there for 2 weeks this year and I gained 5 pounds. It is not cheap, but it is a premium experience. Photographers get exclusive use of the top shelf of the table on the boat. The rinse tank is a converted cooler. The water is changed frequently, but because of the small size most times all your camera gets is a dip before it goes back on the table. Back at the resort there is a deep sink devoted to camera rinsing. I typically put the camera in on our return and retrieved it just before dinner, several hours later. On the boat the crew was always quick to hand you your camera once you were in the water and to take it from you at the end of the dive.

Southern Cross Club, May 2004, Jim Chambers (jimbo_limited@mindspring.com) Tucker, GA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 90 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. This was our third trip to the Southern Cross Club (SCC), and we enjoyed it as much as our previous trips. Owner Peter Hillenbrand has a real gem of a dive resort. The cottages are simple, but they're comfortable and they're kept very clean and well-maintained, and the A/C works very well. Meals are served in a dining room in the main building, and the food is wonderful. If you have any special dietary issues, they're great at accommodating you (for example, my wife can't eat onions, so they don't use onions on her meals). While we were there on our last two trips, the annual Sister Islands cook-off was held, and SCC won the grand prize, which

was no surprise to us. Dive crews are very friendly, and they clearly wanted us to have fun. They're knowledgeable of the dive sites, and their dive briefings were very thorough. They ask you to go with the guided dive tour on your first dive, but after they're sure about your abilities, you can do your own dive if you like. Sometimes Deborah and I went off on our own, but sometimes we followed the divemaster when they promised something really good (and they always delivered). The reefs on Little Cayman are just as good today as they were when we started diving Little Cayman and Cayman Brac in 1989. Sea life is prolific, and sea turtles seem to get more abundant every year. We saw huge groupers and barracuda on every dive. The massive spur-and-groove coral formations are teeming with fish, and if you look hard enough, you'll see every manner of little critters, which are my favorite photographic subjects. I spent a lot of my time on my belly in the sand flats and coral rubble photographing the little guys, and I got some super photos. Deborah and I are not deep divers, but it's impossible to not love Bloody Bay wall. We've dived a lot of walls in the Caribbean and the Pacific, and nothing tops Bloody Bay wall! There are cheaper places on Little Cayman, but we don't mind paying a little more for the Southern Cross Club. Dive crews were very camera-friendly and took care to keep photographic gear safe. Dive boats did not have camera tables, but cameras were placed in large coolers filled with fresh water. If there were too many cameras, they put more coolers onboard. (www.southerncrossclub.com)

Southern Cross, June 2004, Brian Bolton (Meg1gator@cfl.rr.com) Winter Springs, FL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. All good, great as a matter of fact. The food was outstanding! Large rinse tanks available, guides found critters as requested and more, entry and exit with heavy photo gear done well.

COLOMBIA

Two islands, while under the Colombian flag, are less than 75 miles off the coast of Nicaragua and have a strong Caribbean flavor. They do not pose the travel risks of mainland Colombia and you can reach them from Costa Rica. You may find good diving, though some operators may make no effort to take you to it.

Providencia

Felipe's Diving, Sol Caribe, November 2003, Sandy Falen (skfalen@cox.net) Topeka, KS. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 110 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. This is remote and virgin diving, and the island is a step back in time compared to much of the Caribbean which is a large part of Providencia's charm. After an overnight in San Jose, Costa Rica (SJO), my companions and I flew West Caribbean Air (WCA) to San Andres, connecting on to Providencia. WCA was efficient and friendly, and when our flight from SJO was late, the WCA staff whisked us through the San Andres airport to ensure we'd make our connection. The Sol Caribe Hotel